

Remarks at a Memorial Service for Governor Lawton Chiles

January 28, 1999

Lawton would get a huge kick out of knowing that I have just been upstaged by his 10-year-old granddaughter. *[Laughter]* When both the grandkids were singing, I was thinking, you know this is what Lawton would liked to have done if he had not been a politician, sort of the wandering minstrel for America. *[Laughter]* And in some ways, he was.

I looked through the Scripture to find something that referenced how he started his political campaign, and there's a verse in Genesis which says, "Arise, walk through the land and the length of it and in the breadth of it, for I will give it to thee." I think in so many ways God gave Florida to Lawton so that he could give himself to the people of his beloved State. And in so many ways, his homespun humor and his common sense became the glue that held Florida together as it exploded and diversified and changed in ways that make it almost unrecognizable to people who were there three decades ago.

Every one of us who knew Lawton Chiles feels blessed. If we knew him very well, we loved him. He gave something to all of us. He gave me a lot when we were serving together as Governors. I mean, I couldn't imagine—I was serving as Governor with someone who had been chairman of the Senate Budget Committee. And he made sure that I was always aware of what I should know before I voted however he wanted me to vote in the Governor's conference on whatever it was. *[Laughter]*

I loved campaigning with him in Florida. I loved—it's almost a sad thing to say, but it was very moving for me—Florida had a lot of natural disasters during the period in which we served together. It was very moving to me to be in these places with Lawton Chiles, to see the pulse of the people beating in him and the feeling he had for them. I loved all the opportunities he gave me to help Florida, with late-night phone calls about every conceivable subject, the recommendations he gave that Carol Browner and Janet Reno ought to be in the Cabinet.

And like everybody else, I loved the humor. I knew Lawton Chiles long before "he-coon" became a part of our political lexicon. And one of the most humbling nights of my life was a night at the Governors conference that I spent with Ann Richards and Lawton Chiles. *[Laughter]* I thought I was a good storyteller. I thought I knew every phrase that had ever been coined. I listened to them talk about how a stuck pig squealed, how a cut dog barks, how if you can't run with the big dogs, you ought to just stay on the porch. *[Laughter]* Listen, I lost that night. *[Laughter]* But I never forgot it.

You know, Lawton may have worn a coon-skin cap and coat to his own inaugural ball in 1995, and he did a lot of that "awe shucks" stuff with all of us, but we all know that he was really a visionary. He saw the possibilities and the challenges of the future, and he saw his own life as a sort of continuing obligation to push people toward them.

Long before most of the rest of us, as Senator Domenici and others have already said, he knew that we had to put our budgetary house in order if we wanted our children to have a future. And I'm very glad he got to live to see it come to pass—even though Pete's right, he'd want to see all the numbers and all the books and be a little suspicious.

Carol Browner talked about how he saw that in Florida and in the United States we had to reconcile the imperatives of economic growth and preserving our environment. And because of his vision, the forests and the swamps that he loved so much as a boy, and especially the beautiful Florida Everglades, are going to be preserved.

He saw long before the rest of us the promise in every child and the need to give every child decent health care and a world-class education. The fragile cry of his young grandson who sang for us today, born several months premature, inspired him as Senator and Governor to want to give every child a healthy start in life, the chance to make the most of their God-given talent. How proud he would be to see his grandson making the most of those talents today.

I'm told that as he lay in state in Tallahassee a few weeks ago, a woman from Gadsden County, where Rhea and Lawton first began working to improve prenatal care in Florida,

brought her young son to pay his respects. She said that Lawton Chiles had saved her son's life. That boy, and the millions of Florida children growing up healthy and ready, may well be his greatest legacy.

I'd also like to thank him publicly for something else. As Florida explodes and diversifies, he worked so hard to make all his native Floridians—those who were like him—see all the new immigrants as their own, to see those children as a rich resource that would make life more interesting and the future more prosperous.

I thank him for being an early supporter of political and campaign finance reform but in doing it in a way that made sense and didn't raise people's defenses. I don't think he had a sanctimonious bone in his body. He just didn't want everybody to have to spend all their time raising money. He thought it would be better if people talked to one another, face-to-face. He thought it would be better if, on television, people had honest debates and discussions. He didn't go around telling you how much better he was than everybody else because he only took a hundred bucks. And he knew that only one person could have ever made that walk, and then you couldn't just repeat that over and over again. He tried to convince us to relax and think. And he did it in the right way.

Some of you know that, right before he died, I think I had about won a long, intense campaign that I waged to persuade Lawton to become America's Special Envoy to Latin America. He said, "Well, I don't want to spend a lot of time in Washington." I said, "Lawton, it's Latin America, not Washington." [Laughter] I said, "You know, you'll have to breeze through every now and then and give me a report. There's a telephone. There are fax machines. You can do this." And he was really getting interested in it.

And I say that not to make anyone sad, but to say that the reason his life was so rich is that he lived to the last hour of the last day thinking about tomorrow, thinking about other people's interest, thinking about other possibilities still to be developed.

So I thank you, Lawton, for teaching us that public service is not a position, it's a mission; that our job is not to posture, but to produce. I thank you for feeling the pulse

of the people and making their hopes and dreams your own. I thank you for never losing the light in your eyes, the steel in your spine, the love in your heart.

Young Lawton's song was reminiscent of the wonderful lines from Wordsworth, "We can make our lives sublime, and departing, leave behind us footprints on the sands of time." What wonderful wide, deep footprints our friend left for us to walk in.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12 noon in the Russell Senate Caucus Room, Room 325, at the Russell Senate Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to former Gov. Ann W. Richards of Texas, and Governor Chiles' wife, Rhea, granddaughter, Christin Chiles, and grandson, Lawton Chiles IV.

Remarks at the Employment Initiative in Oakton, Virginia

January 28, 1999

Thank you. I would say this is a fairly high energy crowd here today. [Laughter] Thank you for making us all feel so welcome. Thank you, Cheryl Simms. She was nervous as a cat. [Laughter] And I said, "Look, Cheryl, that microphone, it will carry your voice. Just pretend you're talking to a friend or two." And I think she did a fine job, don't you? Let's give her a hand. [Applause]

I'd like to thank Mirian Graddick and Mary Jane McKeever for making us feel so welcome here today. I thank Secretary Herman and Secretary Riley for their wonderful work on the announcements I am about to make. I want to thank my longtime friend Senator Chuck Robb for being a terrific Senator for the State of Virginia and on education issues for all the United States.

And I'd like to recognize two Members of the House of Representatives who are here, who have been very, very active on these issues: Congressman Tim Roemer from Indiana, and Representative Dennis Kucinich from Cleveland, Ohio. Thank you for being here, both of you.

I also want to thank the Vice President for his interest in this. Not very long ago, just a couple of weeks ago, he convened a national meeting with business, education, labor, and government leaders to come up with proposals that will further our efforts